

THE BLIND EYE AND THE DEAF EAR

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The following is excerpted from Charles Spurgeon's Lectures to My Students:

Having often said in this room that a minister ought to have one blind eye and one deaf ear, I have excited the curiosity of several brethren, who have requested an explanation; for it appears to them, as it does also to me, that the keener eyes and ears we have the better. Well, gentlemen, since the text is somewhat mysterious, you shall have the exegesis of it.

A part of my meaning is expressed in plain language by Solomon, in the book of Ecclesiastes (7:21): "Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee." The margin says, "Give not thy heart to all words that are spoken"--do not take them to heart or let them weigh with you, do not notice them, or act as if you heard them.

You cannot stop people's tongues, and therefore the best thing is to stop your own ears and never mind what is spoken. There is a world of idle chit-chat abroad, and he who takes note of it will have enough to do. He will find that even those who live with him are not always singing his praises, and that when he has displeased his most faithful servants, they have, in the heat of the moment, spoken fierce words which it would be better for him not to have heard. Who has not, under temporary irritation, said that of another which he has afterwards regretted? It is the part of the generous to treat passionate words as if they had never been uttered. When a man is in an angry mood it is wise to walk away from him, and leave off strife before it be meddled with; and if we are compelled to hear hasty language, we must endeavor to obliterate it from the memory, and say with David, "But I, as a deaf man, heard not. I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs." Tacitus describes a wise man as saying to one that railed at him, "You are lord of your tongue, but I am also master of my ears"--you may say what you please, but I will only hear what I choose.

We cannot shut our ears as we do our eyes, for we have no ear lids, and yet, as we read of him that "stoppeh his ears from hearing of blood," it is, no doubt, possible to seal the portal of the ear so that nothing contraband shall enter. We would say to the general gossip of the village, and of the unadvised words of angry friends--do not hear them, or if you must hear them, do not lay them to heart, for you also have talked idly and angrily in your day, and would even now be in an awkward position if you were called to account for every word that you have spoken, even about your dearest friend. Thus Solomon argued as he closed the passage which we have quoted--"For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise has cursed others."

BLIND EYE AND DEAF EAR IN BEGINNING A NEW MINISTRY

In enlarging upon my text, let me say first--when you commence your ministry make up your mind to begin with a clean sheet; be deaf and blind to the long-standing differences which may survive in the church. As soon as you enter upon your pastorate you may be waited upon by persons who are anxious to secure your adhesion to their side in a family quarrel or church dispute; be deaf and blind to these people, and assure them that bygones must be bygones with you, and that as you have not inherited your predecessor's cupboard you do not mean to eat his cold meat. If any flagrant injustice had been done, be diligent to set it right, but if it be a mere feud, bid the quarrelsome party cease from it, and tell him once for all that you will have nothing to do with it. The answer of Gallio will almost suit you: "If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: but if it be a question of words and names, and vain janglings, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters."

When I came to New Park Street Chapel as a young man from the country, and was chosen pastor, I was speedily interviewed by a good man who had left the church, having, as he said, been "treated shamefully." He mentioned the names of half-a-dozen persons, all prominent members of the church, who had behaved in a very unchristian manner to him, he, poor innocent sufferer, having been a model of patience and holiness. I learned his character at once from what he said about others (a mode of judging which has never misled me), and I made up my mind how to act. I told him that the church had been in a sadly unsettled state, and that the only way out of the snarl was for every one to forget the past and begin again. He said that the lapse of years did not alter facts, and I replied that it would alter a man's view of them if in that time he had become a wiser and better man. However, I added, that all the past had gone away with my predecessors, that he must follow them to their new spheres, and settle matters with them, for I would not touch the affair with a pair of tongs. He waxed somewhat warm, but I allowed him to radiate until he was cool again, and we shook hands and parted.

He was a good man, but constructed upon an uncomfortable principle, so that he came across the path of others in a very awkward manner at times, and if I had gone into his narrative and examined his case, there would have been no end to the strife. I am quite certain that, for my own success, and for the prosperity of the church, I took the wisest course by applying my blind eye to all disputes which dated previously to my advent. It is the extreme of unwisdom for a young man fresh from college, or from another charge, to suffer himself to be earwigged by a clique, and to be bribed by kindness and flattery to become a partisan, and so to ruin himself with one-half of his people. Know nothing of parties and cliques, but be the pastor of all the flock, and care for all alike. Blessed are the peacemakers, and one sure way of peacemaking is to let the fire of contention alone. Neither fan it, nor stir it, nor add fuel to it, but let it go out of itself. Begin your ministry with one blind eye and one deaf ear.

BLIND EYE AND DEAF EAR IN REGARD TO SALARY

I should recommend the use of the same faculty, or want of faculty, with regard to finance in the matter of your own salary. There are some occasions, especially in raising a new church, when

you may have no deacon who is qualified to manage that department, and, therefore, you may feel called upon to undertake it yourselves. In such a case you are not to be censured; you ought even to be commended. Many a time also the work would come to an end altogether if the preacher did not act as his own deacon, and find supplies both temporal and spiritual by his own exertions. To these exceptional cases I have nothing to say but that I admire the struggling worker and deeply sympathize with him, for he is overweighted, and is apt to be a less successful soldier for his Lord because he is entangled with the affairs of this life.

In churches which are well established, and afford a decent maintenance, the minister will do well to supervise all things, but interfere with nothing. If deacons cannot be trusted they ought not to be deacons at all, but if they are worthy of their office they are worthy of our confidence. I know that instances occur in which they are sadly incompetent and yet must be borne with, and in such a state of things the pastor must open the eye which otherwise would have remained blind. Rather than the management of church funds should become a scandal we must resolutely interfere, but if there is no urgent call for us to do so we had better believe in the division of labour, and let deacons do their own work.

We have the right with financial matters if we please, but it will be our wisdom as much as possible to let them alone, if others will manage them for us. When the purse is bare, the wife sickly, and the children numerous, the preacher must speak if the church does not properly provide for him; but to be constantly bringing before the people requests for an increase of income is not wise. When a minister is poorly remunerated, and he feels that he is worth more, and that the church could give him more, he ought kindly, boldly, and firmly to communicate with the deacons first, and if they do not take it up he should then mention it to the brethren in a sensible, business-like way, not as craving a charity, but as putting it to their sense of honour, that "the labourer is worthy of his hire." Let him say outright what he thinks, for there is nothing to be ashamed of, but there would be much more cause for shame if he dishonoured himself and the cause of God by plunging into debt: let him therefore speak to the point of a proper spirit to the proper persons, and there end the matter, and not resort to secret complaining.

Faith in God should tone down our concern about temporalities, and enable us to practice what we preach, namely--"Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink; or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." Some who have pretended to live by faith have had a very shrewd way of drawing out donations by turns of the indirect corkscrew, but you either ask plainly, like men, or you will leave it to the Christian feeling of your people, and turn to the items and modes of church finance a blind eye and a deaf ear.

BLIND EYE AND DEAF EAR TOWARD GOSSIP

The blind eye and the deaf ear will come in exceedingly well in connection with the gossips of the place. Every church, and, for the matter of that, every village and family, is plagued with certain Mrs. Grundys who drink tea and talk vitriol. They are never quiet, but buzz around to the

great annoyance of those who are devout and practical. No one needs to look far for perpetual motion, he has only to watch their tongues. At tea-meetings, Dorcas meetings, and other gatherings, they practice vivisection upon the characters of their neighbours, and of course they are eager to try their knives upon the minister, the minister's wife, the minister's children, the minister's wife's bonnet, the dress of the minister's daughter, and how many new ribbons she has worn for the last six months, and so on ad infinitum.

There are also certain persons who are never so happy as when they are "grieved to the heart" to have to tell the minister that Mr. A. is a snake in the grass, that he is quite mistaken in thinking so well of Messrs. B. and C., and that they have heard quite "promiscuously" that Mr. D. and his wife are badly matched. Then follows a long string about Mrs. E., who says that she and Mrs. F. overheard Mrs. G. say to Mrs.

H. that Mrs. J. should say that Mr. K. and Miss L. were going to move from the chapel and hear Mr. M., and all because of what old N. said to young O. about that Miss P.

Never listen to such people. Do as Nelson did when he put his blind eye to the telescope and declared that he did not see the signal [to retreat], and therefore would go on with the battle.

Let the creatures buzz, and do not even hear them, unless indeed they buzz so much concerning one person that the matter threatens to be serious; then it will be well to bring them to book and talk in sober earnestness to them. Assure them that you are obliged to have facts definitely before you, that your memory is not very tenacious, that you have many things to think of, that you are always afraid of making any mistake in such matters, and that if they would be good enough to write down what they have to say the case would be more fully before you, and you could give more time to its consideration. Mrs. Grundy will not do that; she has a great objection to making clear and definite statements; she prefers talking at random.

I heartily wish that by any process we could put down gossip, but I suppose that it will never be done so long as the human race continues what it is, for James tells us that "every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed by mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." What can't be cured must be endured, and the best way of enduring it is not to listen to it. Over one of our old castles a former owner has inscribed these lines--

THEY SAY. WHAT DO THEY SAY? LET THEM SAY.

Thin-skinned persons should learn this motto by heart. The talk of the village is never worthy of notice, and you should never take any interest in it except to mourn over the malice and heartlessness of which it is too often the indicator.

Mayow in his Plain Preaching very forcibly says, "If you were to see a woman kill a farmer's ducks and geese for the sake of having one of the feathers, you would see a person acting as we

do when we speak evil of anyone, for the sake of the pleasure we feel in evil speaking. For the pleasure we feel is not worth a single feather, and the pain we give is often greater than a man feels at the loss of his property."

Insert a remark of this kind now and then in a sermon, when there is no special gossip abroad, and it may be of some benefit to the more sensible:
I quite despair of the rest.

Above all, never join in tale-bearing yourself, and beg your wife to abstain from it also. Some men are too talkative by half, and remind me of the young man who was sent to Socrates to learn oratory. On being introduced to the philosopher he talked so incessantly that Socrates asked for double fees. "Why charge me double?" said the young fellow. "Because," said the orator, "I must teach you two sciences: the one how to hold your tongue and the other how to speak." The first science is the more difficult, but aim at proficiency in it, or you will suffer greatly, and create trouble without end.

BLIND EYE AND DEAF EAR TOWARD CRITICISM

Avoid with your whole soul that spirit of suspicion which sours some men's lives, and to all things from which you might harshly draw an unkind inference turn a blind eye and a deaf ear. Suspicion makes a man a torment to himself and a spy towards others. Once begin to suspect, and causes for distrust will multiply around you, and your very suspiciousness will create the major part of them. Many a friend has been transformed into an enemy by being suspected. Do not, therefore, look about you with the eyes of mistrust, nor listen as an eaves-dropper with the quick ear of fear.

To go about the congregation ferreting out disaffection, like a gamekeeper after rabbits, is a lowly employment, and is generally rewarded most sorrowfully. Lord Bacon wisely advises "the provident stay of enquiry of that which we would be loath to find." When nothing is to be discovered which will help us to love others, we had better cease from the enquiry, for we may drag to light that which may be the commencement of years of contention.

I am not, of course, referring to cases requiring discipline which must be thoroughly investigated and boldly dealt with, but I have upon my mind mere personal matters where the main sufferer is yourself; here it is always best not to know, nor wish to know, what is being said about you, either by friends or foes. Those who praise us are probably as much mistaken as those who abuse us, and the one may be regarded as a set off to the other, if indeed it be worthwhile taking any account at all of man's judgment.

If we have the approbation of our God, certified by a placid conscience, we can afford to be indifferent to the opinions of our fellow men, whether they commend or condemn. If we cannot reach this point we are babes and not men.

Some are childishly anxious to know their friend's opinion of them, and if it contain the smallest element of dissent or censure, they regard him as an enemy forthwith. Surely we are not popes, and do not wish our hearers to regard us as infallible! We have known men become quite enraged at a perfectly fair and reasonable remark, and regard an honest friend as an opponent who delighted to find fault; this misrepresentation on the one side has soon produced heat on the other, and strife ensued. How much better is gentle forbearance! You must be able to bear criticism, or you are not fit to be at the head of a congregation; and you must let the critic go without reckoning him among your deadly foes, or you will prove yourself a mere weakling.

It is wisest always to show double kindness where you have been severely handled by one of who thought it his duty to do so, for he is probably an honest man and worth winning. He who in your early days hardly thinks you fit for the pastorate may yet become your firmest defender if he sees that you grow in grace, and advance in qualification for the work; do not, therefore, regard him as a foe for truthfully expressing his doubts; does not your own heart confess that his fears were not altogether groundless? Turn your deaf ear to what you judge to be his harsh criticism, and endeavour to preach better.

Persons from love of change, from pique, from advance in their tests, and other causes, may become uneasy under our ministry, and it is well for us to know nothing about it. Perceiving the danger, we must not betray our discovery, but bestir ourselves to improve our sermons, hoping that the good people will be better fed and forget their dissatisfaction. If they are truly gracious persons, the incipient evil will pass away, and no real discontent will arise, or if it does you must not provoke it by suspecting it.

Where I have known that there existed a measure of disaffection to myself, I have not recognised it, unless it has been forced upon me, but have, on the contrary, acted towards the opposing person with all the more courtesy and friendliness, and I have never heard any more of the matter. If I had treated the good man as an opponent, he would have done his best to take the part assigned him, and carry it out to his own credit; but I felt that he was a Christian man, and had a right to dislike me if he thought fit, and that if he did so I ought not to think unkindly of him; and therefore I treated him as one who was a friend to my Lord, if not to me, gave him some work to do which implied confidence in him, made him feel at home, and by degrees won him to be an attached friend as well as a fellow-worker.

The best of people are sometimes out at elbows and say unkind things; we should be glad if our friends could quite forget what we said when we were peevish and irritable, and it will be Christlike to act towards others in this matter as we would wish them to do towards us. Never make a brother remember that he once uttered a hard speech in reference to yourself. If you see him in a happier mood, do not mention the former painful occasion:

if he be a man of right spirit he will in future be unwilling to vex a pastor who has treated him so generously, and if he be a mere boor it is a pity to hold any argument with him, and therefore the past had better go by default.

It would be better to be deceived a hundred times than to live a life of suspicion. It is intolerable. The miser who traverses his chamber at midnight and hears a burglar in every falling leaf is not more wretched than the minister who believes that plots are being spread. I remember a brother who believed that he was being poisoned, and was persuaded that even the seat he sat upon and the clothes he wore had by some subtle chemistry become saturated with death; his life was a perpetual scare, and such is the existence of a minister when he mistrusts all around him.

Nor is suspicion merely a source of disquietude, it is a moral evil, and injures the character of the man who harbours it. Suspicion in kings creates tyranny, in husbands jealousy, and in ministers bitterness; such bitterness as in spirit dissolves all the ties of the pastoral relation, eating like a corrosive acid into the very soul of the office and making it a curse rather than a blessing. When once this terrible evil has curdled all the milk of human kindness in a man's bosom, he becomes more fit for the detective police force than for the ministry; like a spider, he begins to cast out his lines, and fashions a web of tremulous threads, all of which lead up to himself and warn him of the least touch of even the tiniest midge [gnat]. There he sits in the centre, a mass of sensation, all nerves and raw wounds, excitable and excited, a self-immolated martyr drawing the blazing faggots about him, and apparently anxious to be burned.

The most faithful friend is unsafe under such conditions. The most careful avoidance of offence will not secure immunity from mistrust, but will probably be construed into cunning and cowardice. Society is almost as much in danger from a suspecting man as from a mad dog, for he snaps on all sides without reason, and scatters right and left the foam of his madness. It is vain to reason with the victim of this folly, for with perverse ingenuity he turns every argument the wrong way, and makes your plea for confidence another reason for mistrust. It is sad that he cannot see the iniquity of his groundless censure of others, especially of those who have been his friends and the firmest upholders of the cause of Christ.

"I would not wrong
Virtue so tried
by the least shade of doubt:
Undue suspicion is more abject baseness
Even than the guilt suspected."

No one ought to be made an offender for a word; but, when suspicion rules, even silence becomes a crime. Brethren, shun this vice by renouncing the love of self. Judge it to be a small matter what men think or say of you, and care only for their treatment of your Lord. If you are naturally sensitive do not indulge the weakness, nor allow others to play upon it.

Would it not be a great degradation of your office if you were to keep an army of spies in your pay to collect information as to all that your people said of you? And yet it amounts to this if you allow certain busybodies to bring you all the gossip of the place. Drive the creatures away. Abhor those mischief-making, tattling handmaidens of strife. Those who will fetch will carry, and no doubt the gossips go from your house and report every observation which falls from your lips,

with plenty of garnishing of their own. Remember that, as the receiver is as bad as the thief, so the hearer of scandal is a sharer in the guilt of it. If there were no listening ears there would be no talebearing tongues. While you are a buyer of ill wares the demand will create the supply, and the factories of falsehood will be working full time. No one wishes to become a creator of lies, and yet he who hears slanders with pleasure and believes them with readiness will hatch many a brood into active life.

Solomon says "a whisperer separateth chief friends" (Proverbs 16:28). Insinuations are thrown out, and jealousies aroused, till "mutual coolness ensues, and neither can understand why; each wonders what can possibly be the cause. Thus the firmest, the longest, the warmest, and most confiding attachments, the sources of life's sweetest joys, are broken up perhaps forever."

This is work worthy of the arch-fiend himself, but it could never be done if men lived out of the atmosphere of suspicion. As it is, the world is full of sorrow through this cause, a sorrow as sharp as it is superfluous. This is grievous indeed! Campbell eloquently remarks, "The ruins of old friendships are a more melancholy spectacle to me than those of desolated palaces. They exhibit the heart which was once lighted up with joy all damp and deserted, and haunted by those birds of ill omen that nestle in ruins." O suspicion, what desolations thou hast made in the earth!

Because the persons who would render you mistrustful of your friends are a sorry set, and because suspicion is in itself a wretched and tormenting vice, resolve to turn towards the whole business your blind eye and your deaf ear.

Need I say a word or two about the wisdom of never hearing what was not meant for you. The eavesdropper is a mean person, very little if anything better than the common informer; and he who says he overheard may be considered to have heard over and above what he should have done.

Jeremy Taylor wisely and justly observes, "Never listen at the door or window, for besides that it contains in it a danger and a snare, it is also invading my neighbour's privacy, and a laying that open, which he therefore encloses that it might not be open."

It is a well worn proverb that listeners seldom hear any good of themselves. Listening is a sort of larceny, but the goods stolen are never a pleasure to the thief. Information obtained by clandestine means must, in all but extreme cases, be more injury than benefit to a cause. The magistrate may judge it expedient to obtain evidence by such means, but I cannot imagine a case in which a minister should do so. Ours is a mission of grace and peace; we are not prosecutors who search out condemnatory evidence, but friends whose love would cover a multitude of offences. The peeping eyes of Canaan, the son of Ham, shall never be in our employ; we prefer the pious delicacy of Shem and Japhet, who went backward and covered the shame which the child of evil had published with glee.

BLIND EYE TOWARD OPINIONS ABOUT YOURSELF

To opinions and remarks about yourself turn also as a general rule the blind eye and the deaf ear. Public men must expect public criticism, and as the public cannot be regarded as infallible, public men may expect to be criticized in a way which is neither fair nor pleasant. To all honest and just remarks we are bound to give due measure of heed, but to the bitter verdict of prejudice, the frivolous faultfinding of men of fashion, the stupid utterances of the ignorant, and the fierce denunciations of opponents, we may very safely turn a deaf ear.

We cannot expect those to approve of us whom we condemn by our testimony against their favourite sins; their commendation would show that we had missed our mark. We naturally look to be approved of by our own people, the members of our churches, and the adherents of our congregations, and when they make observations which show that they are not very great admirers, we may be tempted to discouragement if not to anger: herein lies a snare.

When I was about to leave my village charge for London, one of the old men prayed that I might be "delivered from the bleating of the sheep." For the life of me I could not imagine what he meant, but the riddle is plain now, and I have learned to offer the prayer myself. Too much consideration of what is said by our people, whether it be in praise or in depreciation, is not good for us. If we dwell on high with "that great Shepherd of the sheep" we shall care little for all the confused bleatings around us, but if we become "carnal, and walk as men," we shall have little rest if we listen to this, that, and the other which every poor sheep may bleat about us.

Perhaps it is quite true that you were uncommonly dull last Sabbath morning, but there was no need that Mrs. Clack should come and tell you that Deacon Jones thought so. It is more than probable that having been out in the country all the previous week, your preaching was very like milk and water, but there can be no necessity for your going round among the people to discover whether they noticed it or not. Is it not enough that your conscience is uneasy upon the point? Endeavour to improve for the future, but do not want to hear all that every Jack, Tom, and Mary may have to say about it.

On the other hand, you were on the high horse in your last sermon, and finished with quite a flourish of trumpets, and you feel considerable anxiety to know what impression you produced. Repress your curiosity: it will do you no good to enquire. If the people should happen to agree with your verdict, it will only feed your pitiful vanity, and if they think otherwise your fishing for their praise will injure you in their esteem. In any case it is all about yourself, and this is a poor theme to be anxious about; play the man, and do not demean yourself by seeking compliments like little children when dressed in new clothes, who say, "See my pretty frock." Have you not by this time discovered that flattery is as injurious as it is pleasant? It softens the mind and makes you more sensitive to slander. In proportion as praise pleases you, censure will pain you. Besides, it is a crime to be taken off from your great object of glorifying the Lord Jesus by petty considerations as to your little self, and, if there were no other reason, this ought to weigh much with you. Pride is a deadly sin, and will grow without your borrowing the parish water-cart to quicken it.

Forget expressions which feed your vanity, and if you find yourself relishing the unwholesome morsels, confess the sins with deep humiliation. Payson showed that he was strong in the Lord when he wrote to his mother, "You must not, certainly, my dear mother, say one word which even looks like an intimation that you think me advancing in grace. I cannot bear it. All the people here, whether friends or enemies, conspire to ruin me. Satan and my own heart, of course, will lend a hand; and if you join, too, I fear all the cold water which Christ can throw upon my pride will not prevent its breaking out into a destructive flame. As certainly as anybody flatters and caresses me my heavenly Father has to whip me: and an unspeakable mercy it is that he condescends to do it. I can, it is true, easily muster a hundred reasons why I should not be proud, but pride will not mind reason, nor anything else but a good drubbing. Even at this moment I feel it tingling in my fingers' ends, and seeking to guide my pen."

Knowing something myself of those secret whippings which our good Father administers to his servants when he sees them unduly exalted, I heartily add my own solemn warnings against your pampering the flesh by listening to the praises of the kindest friends you have. They are injudicious, and you must beware of them.

A sensible friend who will unsparingly criticize you from week to week will be a far greater blessing to you than a thousand indiscriminating admirers if you have sense enough to bear his treatment, and grace enough to be thankful for it.

When I was preaching at the Surrey Gardens, an unknown censor of great ability used to send me a weekly list of my mispronunciations and other slips of speech. He never signed his name, and that was my only cause of complaint against him, for he left me in a debt which I could not acknowledge. I take this opportunity of confessing my obligations to him, for with genial temper, and an evident desire to benefit me, he marked down most relentlessly everything which he supposed me to have said incorrectly. Concerning some of these corrections, he was in error himself, but for the most part he was right, and his remarks enabled me to perceive and avoid many mistakes. I looked for his weekly memoranda with much interest, and I trust I am all the better for them. If I had repeated a sentence two or three Sundays before, he would say, "See same expression in such a sermon," mentioning number and page. He remarked on one occasion that I too often quoted the line,

"Nothing in my hands I bring,"

and, he added, "we are sufficiently informed of the vacuity of your hands." He demanded my authority for calling a man "covechus"; and so on. Possibly some young men might have been discouraged, if not irritated, by such severe criticisms, but they would have been very foolish, for in resenting such correction they would have been throwing away a valuable aid to progress. No money can purchase outspoken honest judgment, and when we can get it for nothing let us utilize it to the fullest extent. The worst of it is that of those who offer their judgments few are qualified

to form them, and we shall be pestered with foolish, impertinent remarks, unless we turn to them all the blind eye and the deaf ear.

BLIND EYE AND DEAF EAR TOWARD FALSE REPORTS

In the case of false reports against yourself, for the most part use the deaf ear. Unfortunately liars are not yet extinct, and, like Richard Baxter and John Bunyan, you may be accused of crimes which your soul abhors. Be not staggered thereby, for this trial has befallen the very best of men, and even your Lord did not escape the envenomed tongue of falsehood. In almost all cases it is the wisest course to let such things die a natural death. A great lie, if unnoticed, is like a big fish out of water, it dashes and plunges and beats itself to death in a short time. To answer it is to supply it with its element, and help it to a longer life.

Falsehoods usually carry their own refutation somewhere about them, and sting themselves to death. Some lies especially have a peculiar smell, which betrays their rottenness to every honest nose. If you are disturbed by them the object of their invention is partly answered, but your silent endurance disappoints malice and gives you a partial victory, which God in his care of you will soon turn into a complete deliverance. Your blameless life will be your best defence, and those who have seen it will not allow you to be condemned so readily as your slanderers expect.

Only abstain from fighting your own battles, and in nine cases out of ten your accusers will gain nothing by their malevolence but chagrin for themselves and contempt for others.

To prosecute the slanderer is seldom wise. I remember a beloved servant of Christ who in his youth was very sensitive, and, being falsely accused, proceeded against the person at law. An apology was offered, it withdrew every iota of the charge, and was most ample, but the good man insisted upon its being printed in the newspapers, and the result convinced him of his own unwisdom. Multitudes, who would otherwise have never heard of the libel, asked what it meant, and made comments thereon, generally concluding with the same remark that he must have done something imprudent to provoke such an accusation. He was heard to say that so long as he lived he would never resort to such a method again, for he felt that the public apology had done him more harm than the slander itself.

Standing as we do in a position which makes us choice targets for the devil and his allies, our best course is to defend our innocence by our silence and leave our reputation with God.

Yet there are exceptions to this general rule. When distinct, definite, public charges are made against a man he is bound to answer them, and answer them in the clearest and most open manner. To decline all investigation is in such a case practically to plead guilty, and whatever may be the mode of putting it, the general public ordinarily regard a refusal to reply as a proof of guilt. Under mere worry and annoyance it is by far the best to be altogether passive, but when the matter assumes more serious proportions, and our accuser defies us to a defence, we are bound to meet his charges with honest statements of fact.

In every instance counsel should be sought of the Lord as to how to deal with slanderous tongues, and in the issue innocence will be vindicated and falsehood convicted.

Some ministers have been broken in spirit, driven from their position, and even injured in character by taking notice of village scandal. I know a fine young man, for whom I predicted a career of usefulness, who fell into great trouble because he at first allowed it to be a trouble and then worked hard to make it so. He came to me and complained that he had a great grievance; and so it was a grievance, but from beginning to end it was all about what some half-dozen women had said about his procedure after the death of his wife. It was originally too small a thing to deal with--a Mrs. Q. had said that she should not wonder if the minister married the servant then living in his house; another represented her as saying that he ought to marry her, and then a third, with a malicious ingenuity, found a deeper meaning in the words, and construed them into a charge. Worst of all, the dear sensitive preacher must needs trace the matter out and accuse a score or two of people of spreading libels against him, and even threaten some of them with legal proceedings. If he could have prayed over it in secret, or even have whistled over it, no harm would have come of the tittle-tattle; but this dear brother could not treat the slander wisely, for he had not what I earnestly recommend to you, namely, a blind eye and a deaf ear. ...

Is not this a sufficient explanation of my declaration that I have one blind eye and one deaf ear, and that they are the best eye and ear I have?

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